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REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN
AT THE 20TH ANNUAL CAF CONFERENCE

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Sorry to disappoint you. (Laughter.)

Many of you in this room have been -- had the opportunity to be introduced by and given nice introductions by your presenters. And a lot of it is boilerplate. But I must tell you -- I mean this sincerely -- the meaningfulness of the introduction is in direct proportion to the respect you have for the person introducing you. And it means a great deal to me.

Secretary/Ambassador Carla Hills and I go back a long way. And we were -- I was a leader in the Senate, and she was a leader in a Republican administration. And she was one of the most formidable minds I ever found myself disagreeing with on specific policy and domestic policy at the time. (Laughter.)

So I want to thank -- I know she's an ambassador. But I think it's a pretty big deal to be a Secretary too -- former Secretary and Ambassador Carla Hills for her lovely introduction.

And, Enrique, Mr. President, I should say, I want to thank you for 25 years of distinguished service to CAF. Your leadership has helped make CAF, and I mean it sincerely, one of the most respected and effective institutions advancing Latin American development. And you will be missed, but I imagine you're not going to miss it all. It's a lot of work. But thank you for all you've done.

And Luis is not here, the Secretary General, because he had a death in the family. But I also think he's doing an incredible job. And I send my sympathies and hope he's well.

And, Michael Shifter, the Inter-American Dialogue President -- that's a fancy foreign policy term for saying you actually get people talking to one another. And it matters. And I also want to thank, as I said, Carla again for that introduction.

For 20 years, this conference has brought together the leading thinkers -- and I'm not trying to be flattering -- but the leading thinkers and policy makers dedicated to this hemisphere.

And in that time, thanks in part to the leadership of the people assembled in this room, we've witnessed a significant sea change in the region. The prospects for unlocking enormous

potential that exists in our hemisphere are fundamentally different today than they were 20 even 10 years ago -- or even five years ago.

For the first time in history, in my view, it's possible to imagine a hemisphere that is middle-class, democratic, and secure from northern Canada to the tip of Chile.

And it's going to take a lot of hard work, a lot of sustained commitment from all the countries in the hemisphere, including the United States, to get that done. But I really believe it is possible. As my grandfather would say, with the grace of God and the good will of the neighbors, we've got a chance to do something that could only be dreamed of even five to 10 years ago.

Because we have everything we need to lead the world in the future. There is no reason why the Western Hemisphere in the 21st century won't be the most consequential hemisphere in the world. I mean that sincerely. We have the resources. We possess the ingenuity, the values, and the dynamism. All exist in this hemisphere. It's all here.

And President Obama and I recognized from the day we took office that there was a lot of history, a lot of baggage shaping our responsibilities and our relationships in the hemisphere. So we made it clear at the outset we weren't going to be bound by the mistakes of the past or trapped by outdated ideologies.

Our relationships would be grounded in mutual respect. We no longer would ask: What can the United States do for the region?

But: What can we do with the region?

I've met with almost literally every President in the hemisphere. And that's the point I made clear from the beginning. Again, it's not about what we can do for you. It's about what we can do with you. And it has to be based upon a respect that is across the board and sometimes has been lacking in the past 150 years.

No region of the world is of greater consequence to the security and prosperity of the United States than the hemisphere. It's in our self-interest to see our hemisphere reach its full potential. That's why we've made it a priority to increase our high-level economic cooperation and boost our trading relationships throughout the region. **Nearly half of our exports -- \$670 billion annually -- go to countries in the hemisphere.**

That's why we've created programs to spur entrepreneurship, build business-to-business relationships, and foster more small- to medium-sized enterprises that create jobs and generate economic growth. This is not a zero-sum game. The more the region grows, the more prosperous it is, the better we are off in the hemisphere, but in the United States, as well. It's in our naked self-interest to see this happen, besides the right thing to do.

It's why we've committed to increase educational opportunities and student exchanges through initiatives like 100,000 Strong in the Americas so that young talented

people from all our nations can learn together, learn from one another; and so they can be exposed to the greatest research universities in the world. That sounds like chauvinism, but it is a fact -- the greatest concentration of research universities in the entire world, because President Eisenhower was smart back when we tried to reorganize our research efforts and decided that it should not all be in the government. It should go through independent universities.

That's why we championed the sensible approach to immigration -- one that protects our borders, while providing opportunity for 11 million undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows and contribute, which they're already doing, contributing their fair share and benefitting from their contributions to this nation.

It's also why we chose to change our Cuba policy that was both ineffective and a stumbling block to our bilateral relationships with multiple countries in the region, throughout the hemisphere. Re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba opened up more space for us to get things done in the region. And it made it easier for us to talk to our neighbors, cooperate, and talk openly, without push back, about human rights. Everyone in the hemisphere should be talking about human rights -- whether it's in Cuba, or in Venezuela, wherever they are being denied, on occasion or systematically.

At the same time, we've made it clear that **jettisoning the last vestige of the Cold War in the Americas, it didn't mean jettisoning our commitment to human rights. Rather, as I said, we expect our partners throughout the region to stand with us and condemn abuses that fly in the face of our most basic democratic values wherever that occurs.**

So I'm optimistic about the future of the region. We can see the possibilities that exist if we keep heading in the right direction.

But I'm also optimistic about the complexity -- I'm not naïve about the complexity of the challenges that still persist.

Even as we meet today, **we're seeing major political shifts take place across the region. In Brazil**, the people, following their constitution to navigate an economically and politically difficult time, abiding by established procedures to manage the transition in power, actually did that.

The United States will continue to work closely with President Temer as the Brazilian government addresses its pressing challenges, because Brazil is and will remain one of the United States' closest partners in the region. Because with democracies, the partnership is not based on two leaders, it's based on an enduring relationship between two peoples.

Next door in **Venezuela**, however, we're seeing the government revert to repressive tactics in violation of its own constitution -- tactics that violate the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which clearly says that: "The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it."

Just last week, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans converged on Caracas to demand their constitutional right to a presidential recall referendum. Their voices must not be ignored. A recall referendum should take place by the end of this year, and the Venezuelan constitution should be respected. And political prisoners should be released.

And the United States stands ready to work with all of our partners in the region to facilitate a dialogue between the government and the opposition that will help improve the lives of the Venezuelan people.

At the same time, there are bright spots, as well -- like the **incredible transformation that has taken place and holds enormous promise in Colombia**. The Colombian people have shown great courage and determination to overcome more than five decades of crushing conflict and bring their country back from the brink of economic collapse.

Successive leaders made tough choices to put the well-being of the Colombian people first. And because of that fortitude, today, the Colombian government and the FARC have agreed to an accord that offers hope for peace. I emphasize: Hope for peace.

We know that a signed agreement will not be the end, only the next phase in Colombia's difficult journey toward enduring peace.

Implementation will be difficult and costly. That's why the United States has pledged more than \$390 million at the outset to support the Colombian peace plan.

And together with the international community, we will continue to stand with the Colombian people as they build a new future for themselves. There's real promise. A lot of work, but real promise.

We're also seeing positive momentum in **Argentina**, where the President -- new president, by the way -- has paved a reform agenda for a way for Argentina to return to the international financial community.

And the reinvigorated partnership between Argentina and the United States has already opened doors to improve security, increase trade and investment, strengthen energy sector cooperation between both our nations.

So, this is a critical moment for the region. A crossroads marked by both opportunities and real challenges.

The choices we make now will define the character of our hemisphere for the remainder of this century. So with the rest of my time today, **I'd like to focus on three areas that I believe -- if we get them right -- we can accelerate our progress and lift up the lives of the people throughout the hemisphere.**

First, no democracy can be sustained without economic growth. And economic growth cannot flourish in the absence of the rule of law.

That's not a United States moral judgement that's being made. It's sort of the new physics of economic relationships. Businesses do not invest in nations where the rules are not transparent and predictable, where the court system is not fair, where intellectual property is not protected. So it's absolutely critical to root out the significant remaining vestiges of corruption that remain wherever governments have been too long run by bribery and influence peddling.

Corruption is a cancer that eats at the body politic, rips the fabric of any society where it is proliferated, promoting inequity and siphoning away billions of government dollars that could otherwise help feed children, build schools, improve infrastructure, significantly increase their security capability.

Corruption aids and abets human rights abuses, fuels organized crime, seeds instability in the country where it prevails, and in the region.

These problems all feed on one another and the United States, among others, is trying to help our partners take the hard, but necessary, steps to arrest the cycle of corruption where it exists.

With the Inter-American Development Bank and other partners, we supported efforts to improve the business environment -- more transparency, streamlined customs procedures, improved tax collection. Representatives from the Department of Justice are assisting local officials with investigations to fight organized crime. We've sent security advisors to help train civilian police forces to respect human rights and aid prosecutors so that people can be confident in the rule of law. Where there is no impunity. Where there is no impunity.

The momentum is building all across the region. And we've seen citizens, who were in the shadows before, becoming activists. We've seen brave prosecutors and judges pursue corrupt officials and start to prove to the people of the region that no one is above the law.

In Guatemala, for example, the Attorney General, working with the U.N. International Commission Against Impunity, has dismantled criminal networks, prosecuted military officials, even charged the former President and vice president with corruption. When we were doing the -- what they referred to as a version of Plan Columbia, the sitting President did not want to keep CICIG. We made it a condition. You keep it or you get no help, the very international institution that helped bring down a corrupt system -- beginning to bring down a corrupt system.

We insisted that the mandate of the Commission be renewed in order to build greater confidence in Guatemala's institutions and continue its good work.

And when Guatemala then elected Jimmy Morales, a former comedian, on his promise to clean up the government, I flew down to attend the inauguration.

During his speech, and I've been to a lot of inaugurations. Matter of fact, as I heard Carla Hill describe me, I thought, God I cannot be that old. (Laughter.) They must be talking about somebody else.

By the way, I subscribe -- there was a great American baseball player named Satchel Paige. He was an African American, wasn't allowed to go to "the big leagues" until he was 45 years old. That's 10 years beyond any pitcher's prime. On his 47th birthday, he pitched a win and the press huddled into the locker room to say, Satch, 47, you pitched a win, never happened before. How do you feel about your birthday today, Satch?

He said, boys, that's not how I look at age.

They said, how do you look at it?

He looked back, he said, fellas, way I look at it is this way: How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are? I'm 42. (Laughter.) And I'm looking at an audience of college students here.

But all kidding aside, I've been to a lot of inaugurations, and President Morales did something amazing. He asked, when he was sworn in, the audience and all the citizens watching at home to stand and place their right hands over their hearts, and join him in taking an oath. An oath to fight corruption and put Guatemala first.

Some thought it was just theater, but it was more than theater. It was a significant historical break from the past on the part of a President the day he was sworn in. It was a recognition that he can't do it alone, that everyone has to contribute. And it was a powerful sign that the region is beginning to change.

The second key ingredient for economic growth depends on securing access to energy that is affordable and reliable. If you can't turn on the lights, you can't make a living. If you can't turn on the lights, businesses are not going to promote themselves in your region.

Students don't achieve their full potential when they can't study after dark or connect to the Internet. Economies don't grow when you can't turn on the lights.

That's why energy security in the region has been a priority for our administration from the beginning. And now is the moment to lock in sustainable energy security that will enable -- and endure -- the whole region when volatile oil prices inevitably rise again.

The good news is, thanks to our abundance of natural gas and clean and renewable energy resources in North America, North America is now the epicenter of energy for the 21st century. Not the Saudi Arabian peninsula. Not Venezuela. Not Nigeria. Not Russia. North America. North America -- Mexico, the United States, and Canada. It gives us an enormous, an enormous opportunity for change. And the United States is now a net exporter.

Earlier this year, we inaugurated a new liquefied natural gas export terminal. The first shipment left Louisiana for Brazil in February. And now that the new Panama Canal expansion is up and running, there are even greater opportunities to supply the energy needs of our partners in Latin America and around the world if we make smart investments to upgrade our infrastructure, to accommodate post-Panamax ships, and to procure new LNG carriers.

In the Caribbean, where energy costs are the highest in the hemisphere because of the dependence on imported oil, this could be a game-changer. **I've met with Caribbean leaders twice last year to support their efforts to transition to cleaner, more affordable energy.** That's why we launched the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative in 2014. And since then we've seen important progress to diversify island energy supplies and start bringing down the costs -- a new deal to export natural gas to Jamaica; new geothermal power purchasing agreement in Nevis; new finance agreements and geothermal power plants in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; a restructured electrical grid in the Bahamas to speed the transition to a modern, diversified power system.

In Central America, we're investing millions in development of their power sector -- including helping regional electricity suppliers develop clean energy plans and supporting efforts to maximize use of regional transmission line.

In recent years, we've seen the volume of electricity traded across borders triple. By creating a regional energy market, countries like El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica -- they're bringing down costs by importing electricity from their neighbors rather than firing up their own thermal plants.

This is critical because if Central American nations work together, the region can be a conduit that ties together the entire hemisphere -- integrating and connecting energy markets of the United States and Mexico through Colombia, Peru, and beyond.

And in South America, we're working with partners from Argentina to Chile to Colombia to scale up renewable energy usage and to promote the safe and responsible development of unconventional oil and gas resources.

Over 34 million people in the region still lack access to electricity. If you go back and talk about the New Deal, the fundamental game changer for the United States of America was the Tennessee Valley Association [sic], bringing electricity to the heartland in the South, transforming America -- the American economy.

With smart choices and investments in energy and infrastructure, we can seize the same opportunity for the region. We can lay the foundations for a secure energy future that will lift the fortunes of people throughout our hemisphere.

And this brings me to my third point. For too long, Central America has been left out of the story of Latin America's rise. Central America is the hub uniting our region -- north and south. But it is also the nexus of many of our biggest and most consequential

regional challenges -- energy insecurity, corruption, crushing poverty, endemic violence, education systems that are lacking, transnational crime.

We saw clearly the human cost of these challenges exactly two years ago, when of thousands of unaccompanied minors from Central America arrived at our southern border. There's only one reason why a parent would ever send their kid on a precarious journey, long and dangerous, in the hands of a coyote or in the back of a rail car, and that's desperation.

What our nativists don't understand -- just like their parents, grandparents, great grandparents, great, great grandparents, it's not like people sit around a rough-hewn, wooden table having a meager breakfast and say, you know, I got a great idea. Let's sell everything we have. Let's give it to a coyote or a criminal organization. They're going to take us and drop us across the border in the middle of a desert in a country that says they don't want us, a language we don't speak. Won't this be fun? Let's go!

It's not part of my speech. But I should add it here. One of the reasons why we're the most innovative country in the world is we've had an unrelenting stream of immigrants picking -- cherry picking the most courageous, the brightest, the most adventuresome, the most optimistic because it takes an awful lot of courage to pick up and go. They happen to be the people who caused the greatest consequential loss for their own country because they have this sense of "I'll take a chance to make it better for my family." That's what built the United States of America.

That's why we're the most unique country in the world. You cannot define for me who an American is -- based on religion, ethnicity, race. It's an attitude. It's an attitude. (Applause.)

So that's why our administration has embraced a two-track approach -- offering relief for those in immediate danger, while also instituting long-range efforts to address the drivers of migration. We've made it easier for vulnerable individuals in Central America to be considered for resettlement programs while remaining in the region, rather than undertaking that dangerous journey north. If they qualify, they can get here safely. If they don't qualify, they should not have made the trip in the first place. It's too dangerous.

We've supported the **United Nations and Costa Rica** in forging agreements to set up temporary shelters for refugees escaping violence so they can wait safely while they are processed and screened for resettlement.

And we've worked closely with our partners throughout the region to enhance their own border management, including at Mexico's northern and southern border. Mexico has stepped up and made a commitment.

I was with one of their officials, who I will not name now, and he said, the problem is people are crossing the border from the south. They're staying in Mexico.

I said, prosperity is a bear, isn't it? (Laughter.) It really is tough.

But the truth is we're ensuring that those claiming refugee status receive the full legal consideration under international norms.

But our ultimate goal is for the people of Central America to build a future of hope and prosperity in their own countries so they never have to make that decision. They never have to choose between the dangers of staying at home and the dangers of attempting to migrate north.

That's why we've built a comprehensive strategy with our partners in the Northern Triangle Countries -- Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador -- the Alliance for Prosperity to help them address the dynamics that have held them back for too long. I don't know how many times I'd meet with the region, and they'd say, well, you did Plan Colombia when you were a senator. We need a Plan Colombia for the region.

And our response was: Understand for every dollar the United States put into Plan Colombia, Colombia put in \$10. Their political leadership made some very dangerous and consequential decisions to make it work. And so we had multiple, multiple meetings -- detailed meetings.

I have a bad reputation for wanting to know the detail. I mean it sincerely. So it's no longer hortatory language. What are you going to commit to precisely? When are you going to change the corrupt policing practices in the five neighborhoods that exist outside of A, B, or C? Are you going to vet those police and let us help you vet them? Are you going to change your court system, et cetera?

And based on a series of firm commitments with absolute dates attached with the great help of the Inter-American Development Bank, we were able to convince the United States Congress to commit to another \$750 million, on top of almost \$400 million which you already have been spending.

But let me be absolutely clear: This is a negotiated agreement among our countries to help eliminate corruption, provide transparency, reform their governments so they can grow their economies and enhance security under the equal application of the law. They are the criteria that need to exist before the enormous potential of this region can be tapped.

As I've said, I've met -- I've spent many hours with the Northern Triangle Presidents. We've met three times this year alone, and I'm meeting again this month. And this is a two-way street. They've also pledged \$2.6 billion of their own money just this year to deliver the promise for prosperity, security, and governance.

There's a long way to go. I know there's a lot of skeptics. I know there's a lot of skeptics. Matter of fact, I can name 200 of them in the Congress. (Laughter.) But they took my word for it, and they went ahead and made the deal -- conditioned upon hard commitments as to what we were going to do.

On the security front, some of the initiatives we've instituted are already delivering benefits to the people of the region.

For example, **in Guatemala and Honduras -- Guatemala and El Salvador**, in order to provide genuine security for all the citizens, they are now dealing with corrupt police departments by vetting -- going and vetting the whole -- that's what we did in Colombia, by the way -- by vetting these entire units, instituting community policing programs in neighborhoods that never saw a cop. Never had any security provided by the government. This generates a greater sense of community and a greater sense of commitment in their own country. And instilling more confidence in the honesty and even-handedness of police organizations. A long way to go, but it's the first time in my 35 years I've seen any of it even begin.

We're going to help eradicate transnational criminal networks that drive drug smuggling, human trafficking, and financial crime. We already have a significant program worth tens of millions of dollars. But we're doubling down on it.

And in order to succeed, we have to engage civil society groups, law enforcement, businesses, individual citizens. I remember the first -- several years ago when the President asked me to take over this responsibility, I met with -- I won't mention the specific country, the President and the Cabinet of one of these three countries, and then I said, I wanted to meet with civil society. They said, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. What do they have to do with anything?

I met with the chambers of commerce. The businesses in those countries telling me what we had to do. And I said, where the hell are investing your money? You're not paying any taxes? Where are you investing your money?

When X, Y, Z Corporation in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador invests in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, instead of the United States or Europe, then you may be able to begin to change the environment where American companies who want to be engaged say, yes, it makes sense to invest here.

Everyone, including us, the United States, has to fight for the better future for this region.

I know the press always points out I'm always quoting Irish poets. They think I do it because I'm Irish, which I am. That's not the reason. I do it because -- with all due respect to all of you - they're the best poets in the world. (Laughter.) That's the reason I do it. The Secretary knows that.

But one of my favorite quotes about us Irish was written by James Joyce. And he wrote the following. He said, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

If you know the history of the Irish people, you understand what he meant. History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. There are millions of people in the hemisphere trying to awake from the nightmare of the governments they've had to endure throughout the last century. We can help them awake to a brighter day and in turn make our future look a hell of a lot better, too.

But I believe today we are at a dawning of a new era for the people of the hemisphere -- our hemisphere. It should no longer be fettered by history. We should not hesitate to work together, to dream big. Our relationships in the region are stronger than they have ever been. But this progress is still fragile. And you all know it. You know it better than I, many of you. And it requires a sustained commitment by all the parties, particularly the United States. We can't wall ourselves off from problems that are not bound by borders -- the threat of communicable diseases like Zika, drug trafficking, climate change. No wall can be built. None that can do that. (Applause.)

These challenges can only be met by a change in attitude and everybody doing their part and cooperating more with basic fundamental standards of behavior. And the opportunities we've cultivated could slip away if we fail to follow through on our commitments, if we were to pull back from the region.

We will only seize the incredible opportunities of this century. We will only realize the full potential of this hemisphere if we stay at it. We demand of our friends appropriate behavior, and we commit -- based on our capacity, which is immense -- to help them meet their needs.

We're only going to rise together. It sounds so trite to say it. But that's literally true. That's what's in the interests of the United States and the American people. And that's what we've worked toward every single day this administration has been in office.

And that's what we're going to keep pushing toward every day until we leave on January 21st. And God willing, we'll be succeeded by a woman who shares our view. (Applause.)

So thank you all, and I'll end where I began. You have made a gigantic difference. The people in this room have made a gigantic difference -- getting us to the point which I view as only, quite frankly, the beginning -- the beginning of an enormous potential.

God bless you all and may God protect our troops. Thank you so very much. (Applause.)